

Officer Reportedly Kept Job Despite Contact With Soviet

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WASHINGTON, June 3 — The Air Force permitted Second Lieut. Christopher M. Cooke to continue serving on a Titan nuclear missile crew for five months after learning that he had allegedly violated regulations by visiting the Soviet Embassy here, according to military officers.

Why that was allowed remains unclear. An Air Force spokesman, reached at the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command in Omaha, the command to which Lieutenant Cooke belonged, said that it would be "inappropriate" to comment because the case was under investigation.

Military officers familiar with the case, however, said that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which keeps the Soviet Embassy under close surveillance, informed the Air Force in December 1980 that Lieutenant Cooke had visited the embassy.

Yet, not until early last month did the Air Force's Office of Special Investigations take Lieutenant Cooke into custody after learning of two more visits to the embassy within a short period. In the meantime, the lieutenant remained on duty as deputy commander of the silo in which the intercontinental missile was on the alert. He held one of the two keys that fire the missile.

Takes Lie Detector Test

Other developments in what appears to be an increasingly tangled case included these:

9 Air Force investigators gave Lieutenant Cooke a polygraph, or lie-detector, test after interrogating him and concluded that he had given them a complete account of his visits to the embassy, thus carrying out his part of a bargain for immunity, the military officers said. But they said that senior Air Force officers overruled the investigators and ordered the lieutenant charged with violating a regulation requiring that contacts with Communist officials be reported.

9 Air Force officers said that Lieutenant Cooke might be given a court-martial that would be held partly in secret because of the sensitive nature of the case.

He has been reported by military officials to have handed to Soviet officials information about the missiles, which caused the Air Force to change targets, codes, and other systems.

9 A spokesman at McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas said that Brig. Gen. Elmer T. Brooks, Lieutenant's Cooke's commanding officer, had decided to keep the lieutenant confined at the base until his possible court-martial, which might not begin for several weeks. The equivalent of a grand jury process has begun, the spokesman said.

Regarded as a 'Crank'

A Soviet diplomat, asked how Lieutenant Cooke had been received at the embassy, said that "he was treated like a crank." The diplomat said that many people visited the embassy with strange proposals.

Lieutenant Cooke's legal counsel, Capt. Francis W. Pedrotty, was asked through the public affairs office at McConnell Air Force Base to comment on the polygraph test given to his client, but no reply came through.

Captain Pedrotty said earlier that he had a written promise of complete immunity for Lieutenant Cooke, which the Air Force Office of Special Investigation had agreed to in return for the lieutenant's full account of the incident.

Military officers said that the Air Force at that time, early last month, was more interested in finding out what information the lieutenant might have given the Russians so that changes could be made to restore the operational security of the missiles.

They said that investigators had concluded, on the basis of the lie-detector test, that Lieutenant Cooke had been fully forthcoming about the incident. But they said that the investigators were overruled by senior officers in the Air Force, who asserted that Lieutenant Cooke should be court-martialed. Later, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger insisted that the Justice Department look into a possible violation of the espionage laws, which could carry a severe penalty if the lieutenant was convicted.